

Finally, thanks to Andrew Johnson for giving me a recap and guided tour of all the major functions of QPAC2. Now that I have a mouse, I should really be using this, the most appropriate "front end".

NEXT MEETING: COWANE CENTRE, STIRLING SUNDAY 13th SEPTEMBER; 11am-5pm

I've just double-checked - this is correct! We are still on the lookout for a demonstration of Text87-Plus4, and anyone's experiences with the new Hermes chip would be interesting to hear. I have a few new bits and pieces to submit to the library, and any other SQLUG-derived programming will be gratefully received! Sorry, no room for a map this time. Please contact me if you need directions.

CONTACTS

Back by popular demand, this month here is a listing of those members who are willing to be contacted. If you have a problem, get one of these guys a ring (before 10pm) - they are all keen to help if they can.

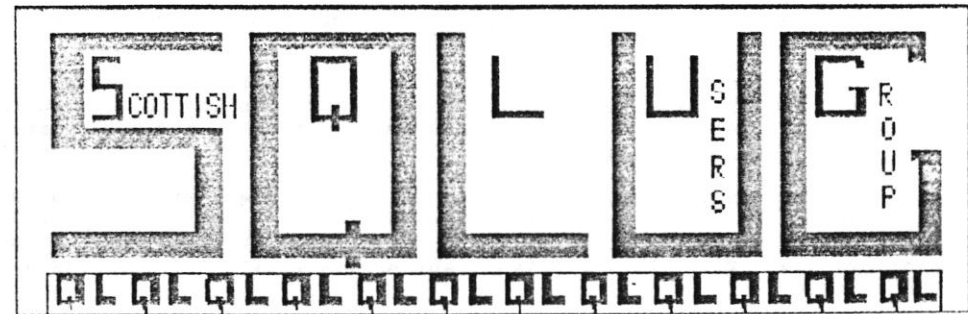
A. E. Alldritt	0479 2811	
Ronald Bezzant	08772 516	FILE RECOVERY
Andrew Johnson	0506 843263	
Colin McPaike	03552 33065	
Alan Pemberton	031 660 1826	BASIC / QLIB
James Patterson	08907 50440	
Iain Robertson	031 441 2361	LIFE / MANDELBROT PATTERNS
John Shaw	041 778 4538	
John Skelton	0383 822462	FAX: 0383 821062
G. Taylor	031 667 5278	
Scott Telford	031 334 1132	s.telford@uk.ac.ed
Alasdair Walker	026 17 283	

The list was compiled from those who filled in the contacts part of the questionnaire a few months ago. Those who left it blank were assumed to wish not to be included in this section. Please let me know if you would like to be included or have your details amended.

LIBRARY CORNER

To order disks from the library, please send the appropriate number of formatted disks, plus adequate return postage, to Iain Robertson, 71 Oxbgangs Terrace, Edinburgh, EH13 9BZ. Please remember state the reference numbers of the disks required. Unfortunately, only DS/DD 3.5" disks (the standard QL format) can be dealt with just now.

Alan Pemberton
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SQLUG NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 37, SEPTEMBER 1992

Welcome to the fourth year of the Scottish QL Users Group. The group is somewhat smaller this month, since about a dozen members did not wish to renew their subscriptions. However, the stalwarts have all resubscribed, for which many thanks!

The Special Edition newsletter is now on hold. We need another 3 or 4 good-sized articles to fill it, but I would rather these came from the keyboards of members other than myself. Please submit your articles in Quill or ASCII format on 3.5" disk (DS/DD) or mdv. Your media will be returned! It's over to you...

Did you get last month's newsletter? At least two members have informed me that their copy did not arrive. If you suspect you have missed a copy, please let me know so that I can issue a replacement. With around 400 newsletters being sent out each year, a few are bound to go astray in the post.

LAST MEETING: MAYFIELD CENTRE, SUNDAY 16th AUGUST

Oops - a major boo-boo this time!!! I got the venue wrong!

I had agreed with Ronald that we should hold the next few meetings at the Cowane Centre, because it has more space. This I promptly forgot, and directed everyone to the wrong place.

Ronald would have twigged to my mistake, but his newsletter did not arrive and so he went off to the Cowane Centre. After hanging around for a while, he put two and two together and caught up with the rest of us in the Mayfield Centre.

In the meanwhile, I had been trying to convince the Mayfield janitor that he had made a mistake and he should give us our usual room (which was thankfully vacant). Eventually, we sorted everything out so that we could stay for the rest of the day. Sorry folks!

There were 12 members at this meeting, with quite a lot of interesting things to investigate, such as the Amiga QL emulator and the serial mouse.

Alan Wilson brought along and set up his Amiga 600 quite early in the meeting. This Amiga has a 68000 processor (like the Gold Card), running at 7 MHz (compared to the standard QL's 7.5 and the Gold Card's 16 MHz). These statistics mean that an Amiga running the QL emulator is

about twice as fast as a standard QL. The Amiga also had 2 MB of RAM installed, as well as a 20 MB hard disk drive.

The QL emulator (version 3.1) is on software - it loads a JS version of QDOS into the Amiga and QL programs can then be run on the machine. The software originated in Germany, but has now been adapted for British users, taking things like different keyboards into account.

As expected, QL programs did work twice as fast as on a standard QL. However, they might not work first time, as there is one 68000 instruction which does not work on the Amiga. Programs giving such problems must first be converted using a special routine supplied with the emulator.

Although the Amiga is a multitasking machine, the QL emulator cannot multitask alongside ordinary Amiga programs. QL programs do multitask from within the emulator though. Unfortunately, the emulator cannot access the Amiga's hard drive, so the floppy drive must be used to transfer information. The driver has been improved from the original version, so that disks can be swapped between the QL emulator and normal QLs. However, the access speed is still slow - about 25% that of the QL.

The QL screen is perfectly replicated in MODE 4, apart from being squashed about 30% at the sides, which is presumably due to the QL and Amiga using different-sized pixels. This can make reading text in the smallest character sizes quite straining on the eyes, although Alan reckons that Professional Publisher is easier to use when slightly squashed in this way.

Compatibility is not a major problem, as was obvious when we had PC Conqueror up and running - i.e. an Amiga emulating a QL emulating a PC! The major problems occur with protected software (requiring MDVs), or programs making use of plug-in ROMs. There are programs for making an image of a QL ROM in RAM, but so far Alan has had no joy in using these to transfer his QL ROM software into his Amiga RAM.

Overall, the emulator is a success, but there are a few areas in which it cannot replace a real QL. The hardware QL emulator for the Atari ST is a more realistic replacement for a QL, but it costs £135, compared to £2 for the Amiga QL emulator software!

As promised, I produced my new serial mouse for scrutiny at this meeting. This is the one advertised by EEC Ltd., who have the exclusive British rights to bundle the driver software with a mouse. The driver alone is available from Pointer Products, in case you already have access to a PC serial mouse.

The mouse is connected to the QL's serial port (ser2) with the use of a small adapter lead (not an interface, as has been suggested in some reports). To use the mouse, the Pointer Environment extensions "ptr_gen" and "wman" are essential (these are integral to QPAC2, or can be obtained from QUANTA on the Specials_0 disk). The mouse driver extensions are then loaded, which provide a few new commands for altering mouse sensitivity and commands for turning the mouse on (SERMON) and off (SERMOFF).

When the mouse is going, it emulates a QIMI mouse. The mouse movement is very smooth, and having 3 buttons (as opposed to two on all other QL mice), more functions are available, e.g. ESCape on the middle button.

There are however, a number of disadvantages to using a serial mouse. The major one is that the mouse runs at 1200 baud. Since the QL has only one global baud rate affecting all serial input/output (unless you use the Hermes chip), this means that the mouse cannot function at the same time as most printers (which require 9600 baud). The mouse driver detects when a channel to a printer is opened, and reverts to the default baud rate (9600, unless another rate was in force at the time of initialising the mouse driver), switching off the mouse. When printing is complete and the channel closed, the driver goes back to 1200 baud and brings the mouse back to life.

Gordon Wright has informed me that the serial mouse would not work properly when his Star printer was connected in serial. He has therefore gone over to using the Mersey Mouse system, which suits his needs better anyway, and is prepared to offer the serial mouse to SQLUG members for £25. (His number is 0455 291014).

Another disadvantage of the serial mouse, which applies equally to the QIMI mouse, is that programming mouse-using programs is not easy. It is necessary to buy either the complex and weighty QPTR development system, or the costly EASYPTR system.

An alternative approach is used by the makers of the Mersey Mouse, where a special interface makes the mouse emulate the cursor keys. You then have the advantage of freehand movements which the mouse allows, coupled to compatibility with all programs (not just Pointer Environment ones). The penalty here is apparently more jerky mouse movement, although I have not yet seen this mouse in action.

A compromise would be to create a driver for the serial mouse which detects mouse movements, works out the corresponding cursor key equivalent, and sends those cursor key characters into the keyboard buffer. In short, make the serial mouse emulate cursor keys.

I demonstrated my own attempt at such a driver, which was done in multitasking QLiberated SuperBASIC, and used DIY Toolkit's QUEUE function to send information into the keyboard queue. This worked well with several programs in making the mouse emulate cursor keys. However, it does need to multitask alongside other programs, which rules out those started with "EXEC_W". It also hits a brick wall when used alongside programs which use KEYROW instead of INKEY\$ to detect cursor key presses.

In summary, the serial mouse is an excellent alternative to the QIMI mouse, and requires no QL surgery. The mouse becomes inaccessible during the use of a printer, but the Hermes co-processor may be able to get round this problem, since it allows independent baud rates.

On other matters, I tried and failed to get John Skelton's copy of WriteTurn to multitask from Taskmaster. This was particularly annoying, as the program appears to suggest that this is possible. Does anyone have any suggestions? Incidentally, WriteTurn is a very useful little program which lets you print out Abacus spreadsheets sideways. This is obviously most useful when it can be multitasked alongside Abacus.

John also mentioned that his printer, which appeared to be kaput when tested exhaustively at a meeting a couple of months ago, has unexpectedly sprung back to life. There's no explanation for things like that. Perhaps the lesson from this story is if something breaks down, don't throw it out and get a new one - just put it in the car and take it for a spin.